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Sunday Brunch In Bombingham

BY DAVID VEST

Late one Sunday morning, on September 15, 1963, I left my apartment at Birmingham-Southern College, on the west side, got in my slate blue Karmann-Ghia, and drove across town to Mountain Brook, where I liked to eat at a place called The Buttery, a long-gone deli that served outstanding steaks, great fries and big jars of pickled green tomato on the tables.

My route took me past Legion Field, across the tracks and down 8th Avenue toward city hall and the municipal auditorium. As I crossed 16th Street I was vaguely aware of a commotion a few blocks to the east, down by the church. Hungry, wanting to stay out of traffic, I avoided the area and drove further north before cutting east and heading over Red Mountain. The radio in my car was turned off that morning. I figured there was nothing on but preaching, and I wasn't interested.

Sunday was my luxury day, the one day I didn't have to get up early or show up anywhere later. I played all week in a nightclub, 9 till 2 a.m. except for Saturday nights, when we quit at 12. After a couple hours sleep (or not) I worked from 6 a.m. until 7 on a live TV show. Classes (I was a full-time student) began at 8. I ate a lot of benzedrine and dexedrine. I was 19 years old.

Once in a while I'd catch a movie at the Jewish Community Center. If there was no bomb threat, the movie would end in time for me to scramble to my gig. Otherwise, we'd all stand in the lobby joking about death and terror while the cops looked under the seats. I'd stay till the all-clear signal and head on down to Bryan's Lounge where I played piano in a five-piece jazz band.

We were used to bomb threats in Birmingham. Not from suicide bombers, these people were far too gutless for that. These were sneak bombers who counted on a community (and a police commissioner, and a governor, and a country) that would help them get away with it.

It never occurred to anyone to call the bombings terrorist acts because they were all perpetrated by the oppressor group, not the underdog. Or, as we'd say these days, by extremists within the establishment, over whom the visible establishment claimed to have no control. The local authorities always viewed the bombings (officially) as "repugnant" (a favorite word of the colluding classes) and "regrettable". More distant authorities demanded that something be done to stop them, orders that often smacked of boilerplate.

In the time between the end of the Second World War and that Sunday morning in 1963, there had been sixty-five bombings of the homes of civil rights leaders and activists. For some reason that number has stayed in my mind. Possibly because none of the bombings had ever been "solved".

For some reason Birmingham-Southern itself had been spared, although many of the bombs had exploded within earshot of the campus. This is surprising on reflection because the college had a reputation (far better than it deserved) locally as a "hot-bed of communism" and a "nest of agitators".

It was true that the college chaplain, Don Shockley, would sit in the cafeteria with students now and then and talk about something like the George Jackson case, but that's about as far as it went. Howard Hall Creed, my favorite English professor, would volunteer to teach courses at all-black Miles College (well before anyone from Harvard

(**Bombings** *continued on page 2)*

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on a busman's holiday made it chic to do so). Once in a while you might meet a student who had read John Beecher's poetry (Beecher had been expelled from academia for refusing to sign a "loyalty oath" later declared unconstitutional).

But we were certainly not activists. What we were was Southern liberals, above it all in our protected little enclave. Radical ideas were calling to us, but we hadn't really heard them yet. As for taking it to the streets, there was something slightly vulgar about that sort of thing. We were all for equality, but not for disturbing the peace and making a racket. We were certainly opposed to being beaten and arrested. So we sat on the hill (actually calling ourselves the Hilltoppers) and lent the movement the "mental equivalent" of support without exposing ourselves to dogs and hoses and cops wielding saps and billy-sticks.

We did, though, have a communist cell at Birmingham-Southern. Actually, it was just off campus, literally across the street out by the old football field, in a little house. They had a color TV and a liquor supply and a drop dead blonde who would meet you at the door and say, "Nice to see you again. It's Jack Daniels, isn't it?" and you knew that yes was the answer to any question she was ever going to ask you and you made yourself confortable and watched the football game and flirted with her. I never heard anyone discuss politics in that house.

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Driving over the mountain I looked up at the big cast iron statue of Vulcan holding up his torch, with its red or green light to indicate whether there had been a traffic fatality in Birmingham. I wonder whether it ever occurred to the city government to have the light indicate whether there had been a bombing within the past 24 hours.

Once you got onto, and over, Red Mountain, you were in a different world, one of money. Mountain Brook may well have been the richest community per capita in the country, as it claimed to be. Nearby was the Birmingham Country Club, which claimed to have "suspended or curtailed no services" during the war and boasted openly of never having knowingly admitted a Negro or a Jew.

A member of the club's board once approached me for a recommendation. Who should provide the music for an elegant soiree? I mentioned that Count Basie was currently on tour and was told that he was of the wrong "persuasion".

Mountain Brook had (and still has) a ritzy little main shopping area, a kind of mini-Aspen or perhaps even a Southern Rodeo Drive. Ted Brooks, a great guitar player and songwriter (his tunes were recorded by Wanda Jackson, Al Martino and even Elvis) and president of Musicians' Local 256, had a music store and studio there. It was Ted who later took me up to Nashville, showed me around Acuff-Rose Music and introduced me to Eddie Arnold and Jack Clement.

Around the corner from The Buttery were boutiques and clothing stores where I bought my famous black satchel and a good suit that made me feel like James Bond. Was I the last college student in America to wear suits to class? I may well have been.

I was feeling good when I sat down in my usual booth at The Buttery. The familiar Black man who doubled as waiter and cook brought me a glass of water and turned away without a smile. "I feel good!" I told his back. "Not me," he muttered.

This was unlike him. I had been under the impression that he was always glad to see me coming. "Is something the matter this morning?" I asked him.

"What kind of thing is that to say?" he said with an unmistakable tone of disgust.

"Beg pardon?" I grinned.

"You see something funny here?"

This sounded remarkably like a threat. It wiped the smile off my face and made me ask him directly what was wrong. In a moment or two he understood that I wasn't provoking him and said, "You don't know? You didn't hear about it?"

I told him I had no idea what he was talking about.

So he told me about the bomb in the church, and the four little girls who were dead. He had a hard time saying it.

I told him I didn't feel like eating anymore. "I didn't feel like cooking it, either, but here it is just the same." Then he told me to eat, not talk, because he didn't want any more conversation.

I often think of that man, whose name I never learned, and how he went directly into grieving and not into rage, angry though he surely was. I think about how twenty years of bombings were unable to provoke the black community of Birmingham into violent retaliation, how people knocked down by hoses that could take the bark off trees came back day after day, holding hands and singing.

Not everyone felt quite so noble. John Lee Hooker spoke for many when he sang of wanting to "Get me a plane, fly over Birmingham, drop me a bomb, keep on flyin' on." Hooker always stayed at the Gaston Motel when he played Birmingham, in a room only a couple of blocks from the bombed church.

My boyhood friend, Kerry Pennington, attended the funeral, preached by Dr. King. News accounts said no white person was present — true within the margin of error, but Kerry told me he was there, sitting in the back row, and that his father had threatened to disinherit him if he went. "I feel it's my place", he said, in the quiet voice no one to my knowledge had ever heard him raise.

Two months later, JFK was dead in Dallas. I came out of the college cafeteria, got in my Ghia, and switched on the radio to hear the news on WVOK. The announcement that the president had been shot was followed by a joyous recording of "Dixie" played by a "Dixieland" band. In a few years some of the same Birmingham disk jockeys who greeted the Kennedy assassination with open hallelujahs would be smashing Beatles' records over John Lennon's comment that the boys from Liverpool were "more popular than Jesus".

Those who harbor terrorists are terrorists themselves, says the president these days, as the last of the suspects in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing is hauled away, guilty. CP

David Vest now lives a blameless life in Portland,, pianist in CounterPunch's favorite Oregon blues band, The Cannonballs.

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Our Little Secrets

Guinea Pigs In Freedom's Cause

No surprise here at CounterPunch about the recent disclosures of military testing of nerve gas upon unsuspecting members of the US military back in the 1960s. In the late 1970s the CIA made the mistake of responding to a Freedom of Information Act request by the Scientologists by contemptuously sending them a railroad car of shredded documents.

The Scientologists patiently pieced enough of the thousands of scraps of paper together to figure out that in 1951 the US Army had secretly contaminated the Norfolk Naval Supply Center in Virginia with infectious bacteria. One type of bacterium was chosen because blacks were believed to be more susceptible than whites.

The towns of Savannah, Georgia and Avon Park, Florida, were targets of repeated army bio-weapons experiments in 1956 and 1957. Army CBW researchers released millions of mosquitoes on the two towns in order to test the ability of insects to carry and deliver dengue and yellow fever. Hundreds fell ill, with fevers, respiratory distress, still births and encephalitis. Several died.

This was the high tide of secret experiments by government agencies on unsuspecting or coerced human guinea pigs. As your CounterPunch editors described in their book Whiteout, CIA director Allen Dulles gave the late Sydney Gottlieb (boss of the Agency's Chemical Division) $300,000 to test LSD and other potions, some of them lethal. Gottlieb passed some of the money on to Dr Harris Isbell, who ran the Center for Addiction Research in Lexington, Kentucky, thriving on the CIA subventions (funneled through the National Institutes of Health) and acting as middleman for the Agency for its supplies of narcotics and hallucinogens from the drug companies.

Isbell fed morphine and heroin to prisoners remanded to the Center, among them black heroin addicts into whom he also injected staggering amounts of LSD for 77 straight days, measuring their reactions as he did so.

CounterPuncher John Williams worked at the Center, and recently sent us these reminiscences.

"I worked at the Addiction Research Center about thirty years ago. It was located in one of Lexington's white-picket fenced rural areas, 600 Leestown Pike. The head of the Center then was Dr. William Martin, MD (he replaced Isbell).

"My immediate supervisor was Harold Flanary. I worked there as a health physicist. My primary duties were the design, modification, repair and maintenance of laboratory equipment - primarily automatic injectors, stimulus generators and recording devices. I never worked directly with the prisoners, and in the two years I worked there, ran into perhaps three prisoners in ARC custody being "tested". The ARC was located in a complex that had a minimum security federal prison that housed both male and female prisoners (while I was there a famous Illinois Governor was incarcerated, I don't recall his name).

"Part of the prison also included a Clinical Research Center, with which I was not too familiar. The ARC prisoners were lifers bused in, and were not derived from the prison population there, which primarily consisted of frauds, embezzlers, forgers, other mostly white and white collar criminals. The prison had a major problem with female prisoners constantly turning up pregnant. The prison cafeteria food was some of the best I've ever eaten anywhere.

"Some things of possible interest to you:

(1) While at that time I did not realize that the ARC was a CIA operation, I suspected somebody big was behind us. The psychiatrists there talked about the development of a drug called "M-cubed". It was 1,000 times more potent than LSD, and it was designed to be used against Castro and other communist leaders. I used to eat lunch regularly with about a dozen psychiatrists, psychologists, pharmacologists, and neurologists, and we all talked a lot about our work.

(2) While I was there, there were at least three ARC prison riots from what I was told, each apparently effectively repressed.

(3) On the upper floor of the prison were housed about fifty World War Two veterans who were among the thousands on whom the VA performed lobotomies to treat "shell shock" (PTSD). Essentially, they were walking vegetables. This saddened me greatly as I am a disabled veteran myself.

(4) Much of the equipment I maintained was used to periodically inject beagle dogs, chimps, and monkeys. There were about a dozen chimps and monkeys, and close to fifty dogs. To keep the dogs in place, their spines were surgically broken. After a short time of what appeared to me to be great suffering, they died and were systematically replaced. Some were autopsied.

"Had enough?

"Sincerely, John J. Williams"

The psychiatrists at Lexington worked on M-Cubed, a drug 1000 times more powerful than LSD, to be used on Castro.

Why Reds Live Longer

Until quite recently one could look out into audiences and see 70-year and 80-year old Commies organizing for good causes, alive and kicking decades after the FBI agents and congressional investigators who persecuted them in the 1950s had keeled over from coronaries, lung cancer and kindred summonses by the Reaper. A few years ago when Sender Garlin died in Boulder at the age of 97, co-editor Cockburn described him as America's senior radical. When the dust settled, it turned out that the (still frisky) Most Senior was an emeritus prof at MIT aged 106. He'd been accused of trying to overthrow the Commonwealth of Massachusetts back in the 1940s, then as now a very sound ambition.

CounterPunch's theory is that Reds

(**OLS** *continued on page 5)*

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The War on Teen Moms

By Christine TenBarge

In the midst of writing a scholarly, reference-laden, theoretically derived, empirically tested, impossibly long dissertation, I got stuck, not for the first time, on the injustice of blaming pregnant and parenting teens for the social ills and moral decay of the United States, this same decay to be duly cauterized by the re-authorization of welfare reform to include $300 million to promote marriage and abstinence of those lazy, overweight, immoral, endlessly pregnant welfare recipients, i.e. black and brown people.

For the ninth straight year in a row, teen birthrates have fallen, and are the lowest they have been since the 1950s. Crowing over such numbers liberals, whose abuse of black teen mothers peaked in Clinton-time, exult as much as right-wingers, who thrill to any evidence there will be less black people around.

We punish young people of color in this country because it's easy to castigate a population that doesn't have any money, power, or influence.

The Left let the Right co-opt the language and laws and finally cement in place the official public consensus that teen mothers are just plain bad and we have to prevent more pregnancies. Both Right and Left shamelessly race each other to the bottom to see who can prevent the most pregnancies in the most punitive ways imaginable (TANF [formerly AFDC] sanctions, stricter statutory rape laws, harsher work requirements, pushing marriage, shaming, ridiculing, alienating).

The Right not only won the battle over teaching sexuality education in the schools, but defined the public discourse on sexual health and freedom, because organizations like Planned Parenthood Federation, Kirby's ETR Associates, and the fashionable Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy gave in and, in TK's words, "tried to appropriate the 'family values' rhetoric of the right, 'joining in a contest to be best at preventing teen sex'".

Why did those liberal-leaning groups give into the pressure of the Right? Apart from anything else, they were following the money. Research into all aspects of teenage pregnancy and parenthood coincided with the beginning of federal funding of reproductive health care, the decriminalizing of birth control and abortion, the psychosocial-economic-sexual freedoms gained by the Civil Rights and Women's movement, and the ending of the Vietnam War.

The provision of funding for public health services legitimates the spending of public funds for research into efficacy and accountability of said funding, and the government took full advantage. Thus begins, and persists for over three decades, the assertion by social welfare researchers that adolescent pregnancy and childbearing is bad. Never mind that teen birth rates would be lower over the next three decades than they were in the 1950s, and, in fact, the teen birth rate would decrease by 30 percent from 1970 to 2001.

To put it in the argot of an academic bibliography, adolescent pregnancy and childbearing were determined to be bad individually and collectively (Grogger & Broners, 1993; Hayes, 1987; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Maynard, 1997); psychologically and physiologically (Guervara, Young & Mueller, 2001; Hayes, 1987; Nietz, 1999; Trad, 1999; Young, Martin, Young & Ting, 2001); socially and politically (Hayes, 1987; Hotz, McElroy, & Sanders, 1997; Rhode, 1993); and, most importantly, perhaps, economically (Duncan & Hoffman, 1990; Haas-Wilson, 1993; Hayes, 1987; Matthews, Ribar & Wilhelm, 1997; Medoff, 1999).

An influential publication commissioned by the National Research Council in 1987, Risking the Future (Hayes), caught the wave of research. It pathologized teen pregnancy and childbearing, and generated countless and substantially funded empirical investigations, lofty theoretical analysis, political debates, editorials, and high profile hand wringing among researchers, scholars, educators, politicians, and healthcare providers, well into the next decade.

Then, in the 1990s, an alternative paradigm for studying, explaining and understanding adolescent pregnancy and childbearing emerged, mainly through the bold efforts of Arline T. Gernonimus, sociologist and professor at Michigan University's School of Public Health.

Geronimus questioned a number of shop-worn assertions: whether teen women should be considered adolescents, or whether the age/maturity relationship is culture-specific; whether teen women become mothers in response to extreme socioeconomic deprivation as a rational adaptive strategy of survival; whether reported educational effects on the children of adolescent mothers was more appropriately explained by biased standardized tests; whether a teenage birth does not make a young woman living in extreme circumstances any worse, and may, in fact, have a beneficial effect on her socioeconomic status; whether the focus on teenage childbearing as a destructive societal force obfuscates the more urgent needs of an inequitable distribution of wealth, goods and services to a group that does not have the same options and life prospects as most U.S. teens; whether blaming teenage pregnancy and childbearing for social ills and costs, is racist.

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More recent published literature pauses to give a slight nod to Geronimus as it continues to repeat the same old shanty, encouraged and supported by government funded and corporate-sponsored agendas (powerful drug companies for example) that teen pregnancy and parenthood are harmful, fostering intergenerational welfare dependency (despite state/federal government imposed limits); lost educational opportunity (despite increasing numbers of young mothers returning to welcoming alternative schools and graduating); vio-

(**Black Moms** *continued on page 5)*

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lived long because they walked a lot in earlier years, selling the Worker. In England there was the Rambler Club tradition, where Reds strode across hill and dale on weekends, asserting ancient rights of way, and knocking aside the newly stretched wire and gates of Enclosers trying to keep the rabble out. CounterPuncher Joe Paff points out that orchestral conductors live long too because they get plenty of exercise in the upper body. Conductors have their Beethoven scores and Commies had Roberts Rules, sitting far into the night, waiting to refer the motion back to the rules committee before trudging healthfully home. Reds stay interested. In other words: they stay Alive.

When Cockburn cited the 106-year old Massachusetts prof in talks around the Pacific Northwest, Bill Margolis of Portland sent us the following message.

"As a Portlander as well as a mathematician, I was pleased to see the reference to`the '(still frisky) Most Senior' : Dirk Stuik, a great historian of math as well as yankee industry, alas died at 106, October 2000. His book: Concise History of Mathematics is still in print. When asked about his longevity he said it was the three M's : marxism, mathematics, and marriage. His wife died only a few years before at age 99. There is a lot to be found on the internet, but I am not sure about the following tidbits (from an old hardcopy maths newsletter). A bit more of the measure of the man: some of his former students wanted to honor him with a symposium in his name at age 100. He said sure, but 'only if I can give the lecture' — which he did. Also, he said he was happy to appear at Brown University in Providence because at Cambridge he only could get coffee and tea at the receptions whereas in Rhode Island they had the manners to allow him to have some decent gin!"

GITLIN IN NEW SHOCKER

Embarrassed federal authorities have admitted that a supposedly toxic Gitlin cloud was in fact benign. The alarm was sent out after reports came of Gitlin's participation in a panel on media, in the company of Sean Wilentz, whose toxic effect, according to experts, is only minimally less lethal than the deadly Gitlin releases. But when a report of the Gitlin panel was monitored, analysts found this: "Instead of railing against the media so much, Gitlin encouraged people to find a political campaign they believe in and become involved." Rushing to treat downwind "victims" health workers found those enveloped by the Gitlin cloud frisky and alert. "But this only increases the peril," notes Chris Klaxon, of the Gitlin Alert Response Force (GARF). "Most Gitlin clouds are indeed deadly. I'm worried that this unique event could cause people to drop their guard. Ninety-nine per cent of the time Gitlins kill."

MCSALLY'S ABAYA

Now this, from CounterPuncher Laura Flanders: On your excellent McSally story...Did you know the Army makes the women buy their own abayas? They're even taken on a shopping trip to buy them, courtesy of the Riyadh Air Base welcoming committee.

Laura also tells us that Ms went broke again, and was bought last December by the Feminist Majority which now publishes the magazine.

AMONGST THE SURVIVALISTS

BY JAMES MURRAY

When the agents of disorder slammed their hi-jacked passenger jets into the centers of world trade not everyone was surprised. There is a segment of the American consumer republic that expects catastrophe, economic collapse, the detonation of suitcase nukes or perhaps the ever-timely famine or plague. Only recently have these concerns become fashionable, but for many years they have flourished on America's margins.

Who are these doom-dreamers?

(**Black Moms** *continued from page 4)*

lence; child abuse and neglect; substance use and misuse; illegitimacy; mental illness; death - the usual claptrap, scare tactics, or "sex panic strategy" as JoAnn Wypijewski calls it.

So let's see liberals, radicals and greens dump this covert and not-so-covert Malthusianism and say, Let's spend some of this money we are wasting on homeland security and aid to farmers and USAID and aid to Columbia and an endless, money-sucking, insane military build-up to wage war let's spend just a fraction of that money on improving life options for teens living in dire conditions of socioeconomic deprivation and degradation. Let's give them something other than toxic environments, shorter life expectancy, inadequate health care options, crappy schools, ugly houses, limited educational and economic opportunity.

Let's give them hope for a future where teenage childbearing doesn't seem like a good idea when you have all these wonderful life experiences ahead of you instead of a future where you have to begin bearing children at the age of 14-16 because if you don't you won't survive. You will die. Young. Geronimus, again, presents, in an analysis of economic inequality and social differentials, death as the unambiguous measure of health status. There is a staggering excess mortality rate experienced by black people living in persistent poverty: "The health of poor women deteriorate in measurable ways as early as the mid-20s, perhaps the consequence of long-term severe socioeconomic disadvantage." So it makes sense to be a teen mom. CP

Christine TenBarge will be teaching at the University of Utah as professor of Social Work and Indian Studies this fall.

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Survivalists, of course, and the sociologist Richard G. Mitchell spent over a decade amongst them, rearching his book Dancing At Armageddon: Survivalism and Chaos in Modern Time, published this year by the University of Chicago Press. Despite the book's grandiose title it is mostly reportage, slice-of-life vignettes of Aryan congresses, paramilitary camps and their more genteel non-racialist equivalents, preparedness expos, weekend survivalists camps and militia maneuvers.

To the extent that survivalism has a public persona it is that of all-white enclaves in the desert or mountains where people stockpile weapons and food while studying the Bible for signs of Revelation. Mitchell found a good deal of that of course, but he also found surprises, and if his book is not entirely devoid of liberal patronizing it is also not completely without understanding. Do survivalists have a point? Mitchell keeps having to pinch himself to return to consensus reality. Is civilization a thin veneer? Is our society approaching economic, political and ecological collapse? Survivalists say yes, and the events of 9/11-01 only confirmed their suspicions.

"It is easier to speak of what survivalism is not than what it is. Survivalism is neither a retreat from modern social life nor a search for privilege within it...Survivalists are not principally wayward protesters dissatisfied with their share...Nor are they underclass authoritarians prone to fundamentalist rage against the conditions of modernity." This inability to define survivalism is one of the problems with Mitchell's book. Anything one can say survivalism is not, another can say it is. Thus survivalism is filled with "retreat from modern life". Many are "principally wayward protesters." And as a cultural milieu it harbors its share of "underclass authoritarians".

Mitchell can never seem to figure this out. The heavily armed Christian Identity insurrectionist is probably a survivalist. But so is the Gaia-power Green Party organic gardening gal. The pair has little in common other than perhaps a subscription to 'Backwoods Home' magazine and the nagging suspicion that there are problems and contradictions in the System that could lead to its downfall. Survivalism is not a unified belief system or even a set of responses. It is primarily a faith, that the world as we know it has been/can be turned upside down.

Mitchell finds this faith ripples through our society. Even the platinum-card elites are haunted by doubts that the totality is sustainable, and they may spend hundreds of thousands on gear, bug-out plans and rural retreats. The less well-heeled buy military surplus and their backwoods hide-outs will be trailers without a view. How is a survivalist made? Mitchell barely guesses, but while writing his book in a fashionable West Coast coffee shop he overhears two movie producers fearing the future:

Both: A crash is coming

He: Perhaps it's even planned.

She: The insiders will know.

He: There is a priority list of those who will be told, who can get there money out before it all goes under. She: We should buy a little place, some land we could live off of.

The heavily armed Christian Identity insurrectionist is probably a survivalist. But so is the Gaia-power Green Party organic gardening gal.

The daydream of bust in the middle of boom, the vision of buildings so tall that they must someday collapse, the nightmare of screens dark and cold. Mitchell found survivalists dreaming of events that were ridiculous and sublime, irrational and logical, felonious and benevolent. He mostly likes his research subjects and he finds humanity in even the most crazed Aryan.

His book is at its best when he hangs out with survivalists and reporting on their lives. It is at its worst when he attempts sociological analysis. Then it becomes muddle-headed. Are survivalists pathetic, mock-heroic, ordinary? Are their concerns legitimate? Fantastical? So many people preparing for events so bad...what doest that say about our culture and society? Mitchell either doesn't know or can't decide. I wonder if he wished he'd kept his gas mask on the morning of Sept. 12? CP

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How To Live To Be 106

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